

## Categorical Exclusion Documentation

### A. Background

BLM Office: **Butte Falls Resource Area**

CE Number: **OR115-08-23**

Proposed Action Title: **Pole Picker Thin**

**Location of Proposed Action:** The project is located on matrix lands in the south ½ of the southeast ¼ of section 5, Township 35 South, Range 3 East, Willamette Meridian, Jackson County, Oregon (see Exhibit A map).

**Description of Proposed Action:** Thin 62 acres of 4 to 12" diameter Douglas-fir and incense cedar. The stand currently contains an average of 579 trees per acre. Thinning would leave an average of 294 trees per acre in the 0 to 30" diameter range. The poles would be hand carried (no skidding) in 8' lengths to existing skid trails, where they will be forwarded to existing landings by an all terrain vehicle and trailer using low ground pressure tires. The average slope for the project area is 0 to 8 percent.

The Project Area's gentle topography and easy access has promoted resource theft, illegal occupancy, and off-road vehicle damage in the past. The purchaser would be required to build slash piles in strategic locations to act as a deterrent to off road vehicle use and to provide habitat for wildlife. Slash piles would not be burned.

#### **Design Features for the Proposed Action:**

1. Restrict vehicle use to existing roads.
2. Operate the all terrain vehicle forwarder on existing skid trails and roads.
3. Clean road and ditchlines within the project area of slash and debris.
4. Meet all State of Oregon fire regulations.
5. Slash will be hand piled on existing trails, and lopped and scattered where designated.
6. Wash vehicles and equipment prior to entry onto BLM-administered lands to remove mud, dirt, and plant parts.

### B. Land Use Plan Conformance

Land Use Plan Name: *Medford District Record of Decision and Resource Management Plan (RMP)*

Date Approved: June 1995

The proposed action is in conformance with the RMP because it is specifically provided for in the following RMP decision: "Manage for the production and sale of special forest products (SFPs) when demand is present and where actions taken are consistent with primary objectives for the land use allocation" (USDI 1995, p 75).

### C. Compliance with NEPA

The Proposed Action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 516 DM 11.9 C (7):

*Harvesting live trees not to exceed 70 acres, requiring no more than 0.5 mile of temporary road construction. Such activities:*

- (a) Shall not include even-aged regeneration harvests or vegetation type conversions.*
- (b) May include incidental removal of trees for landings, skid trails, and road clearing.*
- (c) May include temporary roads which are defined as roads authorized by contract, permit, lease, other written authorization, or emergency operation not intended to be part of the BLM transportation system and not necessary for long-term resource management. Temporary roads shall be designed to standards appropriate for the intended uses, considering safety, cost of transportation, and impacts on land and resources; and*
- (d) Shall require the treatment of temporary roads constructed or used so as to permit the reestablishment by artificial or natural means, or vegetative cover on the roadway and areas where the vegetative cover was disturbed by the construction or use of the road, as necessary to minimize erosion from the disturbed area. Such treatment shall be designed to reestablish vegetative cover as soon as practicable, but at least within 10 years after the termination of the contract.*

*Examples include, but are not limited to:*

- (a) Removing individual trees for sawlogs, specialty products, or fuelwood.*
- (b) Commercial thinning of overstocked stands to achieve the desired stocking level to increase health and vigor.*

This categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment as documented in the following table. The proposed action has been reviewed, and none of the extraordinary circumstances described in 516 DM 2, Appendix 2 apply.

### D. Categorical Exclusion Extraordinary Circumstances Documentation

The proposed categorical exclusion action will:	YES	NO
2.1 Have significant impacts on public health or safety.		x
Rationale: All proposed activities follow established Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards designed to prevent job-related illness or injuries.		
2.2 Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990); floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.		x
Rationale: The proposed thinning project area (see map), by design, is outside of unique areas such as those discussed above. No thinning will occur in parks, recreation or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild		

The proposed categorical exclusion action will:	YES	NO
or scenic rivers; national landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands; floodplains; or national monuments. Thinning small diameter trees to 294 trees per acre would not change the overall habitat function of the stand or remove habitat at the species level; as such, the proposed action would not have significant impacts on migratory birds.		
2.3 Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA Section 102(2)(E)].		x
Rationale: Past experience has shown that the environmental effects of thinning small diameter trees (less than 12 inches in diameter) within the forest are not highly controversial. The ROD/RMP establishes the land use allocation and goals for the affected lands; as such, there is no unresolved conflict regarding other uses of these resources.		
2.4 Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.		x
Rationale: A BLM interdisciplinary team of resource specialists reviewed this project and determined there is no threat of significant environmental effects or unique or unknown environmental risks.		
2.5 Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.		x
Rationale: Small diameter tree thinning has occurred throughout the Medford District in the past and is likely to occur in the future. Each thinning project contains its own set of environmental conditions that must be evaluated on its own merit, as the BLM has done with this project. There is no evidence this action has or will contribute to significant environmental effects.		
2.6 Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.		x
Rationale: The Terrarium Thin project (CE# OR115-05-34) was completed within 0.25 miles of the project area in 2005. The Camp Stew II thinning project proposal, located adjacent to the project area, would thin up to 70 acres of dense ponderosa pine plantation. Small diameter tree thinning has occurred in the State of Oregon for years. The BLM interdisciplinary team of resource specialists reviewed this project and found no resource issue of concern that would be affected by this project. The thinning projects have and will reduce the density of the trees in the stands treated and release site resources (water, sunlight, nutrients, and growing space) toward the development and maintenance of the remaining healthy trees.		
2.7 Have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by either the bureau or office.		x
Rationale: The BLM project archaeologist produced a cultural resource survey report and documented on <i>Project Tracking Form for Non-Exempt Undertakings under the Oregon BLM/SHPO Protocol</i> for Cultural Project Number OR110-xx a “No Effects Determination, No Resources” for the Pole Picker Thin project. There will be no impact on cultural resources as a result of this project.		
2.8 Have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated Critical Habitat for these species.		x
Rationale: The BLM project botanist and wildlife biologist surveyed the project area for listed and proposed Threatened and Endangered plants and wildlife and none were found. There is no designated Critical Habitat within the project area for plants or animals. Activities are not proposed		

The proposed categorical exclusion action will:	YES	NO
for Riparian Reserves, therefore, designated Critical Habitat for fish will not be affected.		
2.9 Violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.		x
Rationale: The BLM interdisciplinary team for the Pole Picker Thin project reviewed the project for compliance with applicable laws such as the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, National Environmental Policy Act, Clean Air Act, and Archaeological Resources Protection Act, among others. The specialists found the project to be in compliance with all applicable laws.		
2.10 Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).		x
Rationale: Based on past projects in the Butte Falls Resource Area, the proposed thinning will provide job opportunities in communities such as Butte Falls, the closest incorporated city to the project area. In the 2000 census, 22 percent of the population of Butte Falls was below the poverty level. The Pole Picker Thin would provide job opportunities from the harvest of the trees to the processing of the wood into niche market products.		
2.11 Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007).		x
Rationale: The BLM project archaeologist produced a cultural resource survey report and documented on <i>Project Tracking Form for Non-Exempt Undertakings under the Oregon BLM/SHPO Protocol</i> for Cultural Project Number OR110-xx a “No Effects Determination, No Resources” for the Pole Picker Thin project.		
2.12 Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112).		x
Rationale: Thinning small diameter trees would not result in measurable changes in the rate of introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or invasive species. Existing activities, such as motor vehicle traffic, recreation use, and rural development, can contribute to the existence and spread of noxious weeds or nonnative invasive species; these activities are likely to continue. Vehicles accessing the project area would stay on existing rocked roads, the ATV and trailer would operate on existing skid trails, and all equipment would be washed before entering the project area. These design features would reduce the potential for introducing or dispersing noxious weeds or seeds in or from the project area.		

**E. Signature of Authorizing Official**

I considered the potential for significant impacts to threatened and endangered or bureau sensitive species of fish, wildlife, and plants; cultural resources; noxious weeds; and soil and hydrologic resources. Where appropriate, the BLM has completed surveys for those resources and implemented appropriate management recommendations where deemed necessary. The Design Features in Section A of this Categorical Exclusion Documentation will further protect those resources from the potential for significant impacts resulting from implementation of the Proposed Action.



Christopher J. McAlear  
Field Manager  
Butte Falls Resource Area

6/16/08

Date

**F. Contact Person**

For additional information concerning this CE review, contact David Orban, Project Leader, at (541)944-0112.

**Categorical Exclusion Reviewers:**

Name	Title	Date	Initials
Jean Williams	NEPA Coordinator	6/16/08	JW
Marcia Wineteer	Botanist	6/11/08	mw
Linda Hale	Wildlife Biologist	Dave Roebfs 6/11/08	DR
Steve Liebhardt	Fisheries Biologist	6/12/08	SL
Shawn Simpson	Hydrologist	6/12/08	SS
Ken Van Etten	Soil Scientist	6-16-08	KVE
Leanne Mruzik	Fire/Fuels Specialist	6-16-08	LM
John McNeel	Cultural Resource Technician	6-10-2008	JEM
Randy Bryan	Engineer	6-12-08	RRB
Trish Lindaman	Outdoor Recreation Planner	6/10/08	TL

This map shows a portion of a land survey, likely in the Big Butte North Fork area. The map is divided into sections, with section 5 highlighted in red. Section 5 is located in the center-right of the map, bounded by the Big Butte North Fork to the west and Rancheria Road to the south. The map includes various labels for sections (31, 32, 33, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9), roads (Rancheria Road, Big Butte North Fork), and specific survey points (e.g., 35-3E-6.03, 35-3E-6.01, 35-3E-7.01, 35-3E-5, 34-3E-29.06, 34-3E-32.03, 35-3E-7E, 34-3E-33, 35-3E-6, 35-2E-2.01, 31.02, 31.01, 31.03, -6.03, -5.02, 33.0, 43-3E-33, 35-3E-7, 35-3E-7.01, 992, 998). The map also shows a network of roads and a river or stream (Big Butte North Fork) flowing through the area.

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## Decision Record for

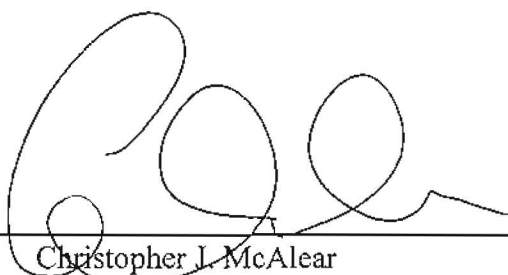
### Pole Picker Thin Categorical Exclusion OR115-08-23

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Based on the categorical exclusion documentation for the Pole Picker Thin project, I have determined the proposed action involves no significant impacts to the human environment and requires no further environmental analysis.

My decision is to implement the thinning of 62 acres of 4- to 12-inch diameter Douglas-fir and incense cedar on matrix lands in the south  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the southeast  $\frac{1}{4}$  of section 5 in Township 35 South, Range 3 East. Thinning will reduce the tree density from an average of 579 trees per acre to 294 trees per acre and leave trees ranging from 0 to 30 inches in diameter.

Notice of the forest management decision for the action described in the categorical exclusion documentation will be posted on the Medford District BLM website at <http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/medford/plans/index.php>. The action is subject to protest under 43 CFR section 4.450-2. A decision in response to a protest is subject to appeal to the Interior Board of Land Appeals under 43 CFR part 4.



Christopher J. McAlear  
Field Manager  
Butte Falls Resource Area

6/16/08  
Date